

Remarks at U.S.-Albania Signature Ceremony

Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky
U.S. Trade Representative

Washington, D.C.
September 30, 1999

Good afternoon, Your Excellency Prime Minister Majko, Minister Meksi, Members of Congress and honored guests.

During my service as Deputy US Trade Representative and now as USTR, we have completed nearly 300 trade agreements. Many are routine affairs; but let me say very sincerely that this ceremony, concluding our negotiations on Albania's entry to the WTO, is an event with special meaning.

Albania's is one of the truly inspirational stories in the world today. Less than a decade ago, Albanians were virtually shut off from the world. In a few short years, facing some of the most daunting obstacles imaginable – from the legacy of political isolation, to domestic instability and war in neighboring countries – Albania has moved to create the institutions of a democratic society, and the laws and principles of a market economy.

Our government is very proud to stand with Albania, with its leaders, and with its people, in this historic and difficult task. And today's ceremony is a critically important milestone. It is the culmination of a long and detailed set of negotiations which will help Albania reform its economy at home, integrate Albania into the world of international trade and investment, and offer the prospect of growth, job creation and prosperity in the future.

The principles of the WTO – commitments to open markets in goods, services and agriculture; transparency; the rule of law – are those which promote long-term growth and development. They are also, as leaders of countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have noted, principles essential to successful reform in transition economies.

This agreement confirms the conclusion of the bilateral negotiations between the U.S. and Albania that are a key component of Albania's effort to join the World Trade Organization. It is a strong, commercially meaningful agreement that will open the Albanian markets, promote the rule of law, and place Albania among the leading economic reformers of the Balkans. In the long run, it will help Albanians build the prosperity and secure the freedom they desire.

For Americans, Albania's pledges on tariffs and services offer market access guarantees and build additional confidence in Albania as a destination for direct foreign investment and other business activities.

This is an important step for our two countries, therefore, as we move forward with the respective domestic requirements that are part of the accession process. Albania's accession to

the WTO, which we hope will take place very soon, will further strengthen our bilateral relationship. We look forward to working with Albania within the WTO system on a day-to-day basis and in the new Round of negotiations to be launched later this year in Seattle.

In summary, Mr. Prime Minister, Minister Meksi, Minister Angjeli, and honored guests, this agreement marks both an historic moment in our bilateral relationship, and a moment of promise and hope for the Albanian people. I am proud to be here to sign it with you, and I look forward to working with you in the years ahead.